DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 432 643 UD 033 060

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TITLE	Against the Odds: Developing School Programmes That Make a Difference for Students and Families in Communities Placed at Risk. Thinking about Full Service Schools No. 4.
INSTITUTION	Australian Centre for Equity through Education, Erskineville, New South Wales (Australian).
ISBN	ISBN-1-876011-10-6
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	32p.; First published in "Childrenz Issues" v3 n1 1999. Written for a national Seminar on Children's Wellbeing in School: Safety, Health and Social Issues in Educational Settings (Otago, New Zealand).
AVAILABLE FROM	Australian Centre for Equity through Education, Corner Bridge and Swanson Streets, Erskineville, New South Wales 2043, Australia ($15 Australian).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*At Risk Persons; *Delivery Systems; Disadvantaged Youth; *Equal Education; Foreign Countries; *Holistic Approach; *Integrated Activities
IDENTIFIERS	Australia; *School Based Services

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how "equity" and "risk" can call into question the ecology of a school. It suggests that failing to follow a holistic approach to a school problem can produce solutions that fail the students the effort was intended to assist. Examining schooling as a process of social production and reproduction leads to examining some of the traps set for educators in the most common risk stories told about students and families. On the basis of that analysis of prevalent ideas about "risk," some principles are established for the development of school-based programs that might make a difference. Some of the school cultural and structure issues associated with these principles are also outlined. These principles center around responding to immediate needs and designing interventions to meet needs rather than to attempt to arrive at "one best answer." Taking a holistic approach that is responsive to stakeholders can result in better coordination of services. (Contains 50 references.) (SLD)

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Thinking About Full Service Schools No.4

Against the Odds: Developing school programmes that make a difference for students and families in communities placed at risk

Pat Thomson.

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Australian Centre for Equity through Education

Linking education, health and community services to challenge educational and social inequalities

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Who we are

The Australian Centre for Equity through Education (ACEE) was established in 1994 as an initiative of the Australian Youth Foundation (AYF), through a consortium of organisations: Eduquate; the Australian Council of State School Organisations; the Australian Education Union; and the Australian Council of Social Service.

The Centre is the focal point for a unique network of people working in education, health and community service agencies.

Why we exist

Young people today are growing up in an increasingly complex world where a smooth transition from school to work is by no means assured. In particular geographic areas across Australia poor educational outcomes coincide with unemployment, low income and poor health.

600,000 Australian children live below the poverty line and in any one week 11,000 school students are numbered among the homeless. The primary schools and high schools these children and young people attend work within social and economic environments that constrain and add to the complexity of their education task.

It has become increasingly clear to schools and school communities that the social and health problems their students and their families face can only be dealt with by cooperation and collaboration across education, health, and community services.

ACEE was established to advocate, foster, and promote this collaboration.

Thinking About Full Service Schools No.4

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Pat Thomson.

Acknowledgements

This paper by Pat Thomson was first published in Childrenz Issues Vol.3 No.1 1999. It is reprinted with the permission of the author and the Children's Issues Centre, University of Otago, New Zealand.

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ISBN 1 876011 10 6

Foreword

This, the fourth in the series, *Thinking About Full Service Schools,* was written for a national seminar on Children's Wellbeing at School: Safety, Health and Social Issues in Educational Settings, organised by the Children's Issues Centre at the University of Otago, New Zealand.

The author, Pat Thomson, is one of the most highly respected educators in Australia. She is especially well known for her work as a teacher and educational leader at The Parks and Paralowie in South Australia. Her extensive writing as well as her work at school and system level has focused on equity and justice.

This paper extends and complements the ideas contained in the first three publications in the series.

Against the Odds: Developing school programmes that make a difference for students and families in communities placed at risk

Pat Thomson

South Australian Department for Education, Training and Employment
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" While things can be done to achieve better coordination among services, the dreams of those of us who work in communities pushed to the social and economic edges can only be fully put into effect if those dreams are also shared by policymakers. The notion of an intergenerational responsibility for the young is surely one of, if not the most important policy platform any society can have."

Some years ago, one of our Year 8 girls literally fell off her chair in class. The day after we had collectively recovered from the dramas of the ambulance, crowd management and telling the parents, we found out that the reason was hunger and dehydration. It seemed that the girl had been taking laxatives and not eating much and was well on the way to a serious eating disorder. Together with her parents and the hospital we organised a programme of counselling. During the first session, the girl revealed that she was not the only person to be involved in this practice, and in her words" Everybody does it". Everybody turned out to be her particular group of friends.

A school based eating disorder group was established with the help of a sympathetic woman doctor from the hospital. In the first meeting, the girls revealed that they had started taking laxatives and dieting furiously in primary school. The school Student Services team decided to conduct some action research to see how common this was. We found that taking laxatives was unusual, but that nearly all our girls- and no boys- started getting anxious about their bodies and their weight somewhere round Grade Five. We decided that we needed an intervention programme for the primary girls and designed a range of activities that focussed on bodies and a variety of physical activities.

At the same time, the doctor discovered that the Year 8 girls had very little understanding of basic nutrition, despite having been taught, according to their teachers, the five food groups with monotonous regularity right through primary school Further action research revealed that most of the students, male and female, had very little understanding of the importance of nutrition and most of the girls did not connect discussions of nutrition to body image or body performance. We had a curriculum problem. The national curriculum outline recommended teaching about body image, nutrition and eating disorders to girls in about Year 9, clearly far too late for our students. We had a curriculum development project on our hands, in addition to the affirmative action programme for girls, dealing with the boys who couldn't understand why we were doing something that looked like fun for the girls and not for them, talking with parents about what we were doing and why, and running the support group for the original group of girls who had been taking laxatives. We also had, as it turned out, a canteen problem, a canteen on which we relied for fundraising.

I start with this particular, unfinished story because it illustrates how complex it is for schools to deal with 'risky behaviours'. I am not going to finish the story because I don't want to pretend to you that the process was ever finished, that there was ever a happy point at which we could stand back and say that we'd 'fixed it'. Neither am I going to tease out the various implications of the chain of events, but I will suggest that what is important is the way we moved from the individual girl falling off her chair to a set of issues that ended up troubling the whole school curriculum and organisation.

I am going to consider how it is that 'equity' and 'risk' can call into question the ecology of the school and I will suggest that failing to follow such a holistic pathway produces solutions that ultimately fail those we intend to assist. First of all I briefly look at schooling as a process of social production and reproduction before moving on to do some head work about the notion of risk. I will examine some of the little traps set for us within the most common risk stories that are told about students and families. On the basis of that analysis I will establish some principles for the development of school based programmes that might make a difference, and then look at some school culture and structure issues that might assist .

Schooling - a percentage game?

The institution of schooling has set for it a range of expectations, and mandates. Schools are expected to fulfil the potential of each child, ensure that all children are active tolerant citizens and productive workers, sort and select for higher education and employment, keep children safe and occupied while their parents are at work, improve standards, deliver a hierarchy of credentials, discipline the unruly and prevent future social mayhem, assist the national economy .... the list seems never ending. In significant ways, the mandates and expectations pull in different directions. Consider how it is really possible to achieve high standards, educate all children to their fullest, at the same time giving out credentials, the value of which depends at least in part on their scarcity and their capacity to rank and create hierarchy (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1982; Dorn, 1996). The trajectories of each pull in different directions.

Sorting and selecting seem to have the upper hand. All over the English speaking world, schooling provides educational advantage to those who are

already privileged (See for example Foster, Gomm, & Hammersley, 1996; Marshall, Swift, & Roberts, 1997; Welch, 1996). Schooling has particular raced, classed and gendered outcomes. There are of course exceptions, individual students who become upwardly or downwardly mobile by virtue of their schooling capital. Schools, including the disadvantaged schools where I have worked, all have such success stories to tell. However, chances are that the competitive curriculum, school practices and pedagogies will not work for many students. The correlation of income, qualifications, health, housing and employment with school outcomes continues as the dominant pattern.

There has been a deal of scholarly and school based work that has examined how it is that particular kinds of knowledge and pedagogies work to alienate particular raced, classed and gendered students (e.g. Delpit, 1988; Dyson, 1993; Freebody, Ludwig, & Gunn, 1995; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Hill, Comber, Louden, Reid, & Rivalland, 1998; hooks, 1994; Kenway, Willis, Blackmore, & Rennie, 1997). What is suggested in the (post)critical literature is that the outcomes of schooling need to be broadened and that the necessary curriculum redevelopment work begin from the standpoints of the least advantaged (Connell, 1993; Singh & Hatton, 1995). The curriculum should focus, this literature suggests, on citizenship and social participation, and the knowledge and skills relevant to being active, individually and collectively, in and about the broader social context.

In the school effectiveness literature, on the other hand, the emphasis is on disadvantaged students being given basic skills so that their overall minimum levels of performance are improved, and so that they all are employable. The curriculum is not seen as a particular problem. Rather, it is the students, their families and their cultures which need to be compensated for, or ignored entirely. Current effective schools policy in Australia talks of schools that 'add value' to students, and of techniques that enhance the performance of students. Such policy uses as its measure of success the acquisition of formal credentials and the results of standardised tests (Hill, 1995). Broader questions of citizenship, ethics and personal development are sidelined or reinstated as they were forty years ago. As Rea and Weiner (1998 : 30) put it,

> *'The concept of 'value added' may acknowledge progress made in urban schools, (but) it does little to increase the life chances of the children it inscribes. The concept is patronising in its communication to urban communities (students, pupils, parents,*

teachers) that DESPITE being working class with the odds stacked against them, they can still, with effort and hard work , do 'quite well'. In other words, the liberal myth of achievement advocated by value- addedness, conceals the material conditions needed for educational success.'

School effectiveness is no challenge to the dominant patterns of schooling. It does not deal with the curriculum, pedagogy and school practices that need to be reformed because they help to construct class, race and gender. It neither challenges sorting and streaming nor does it acknowledge the material conditions of children's lives and how they might affect learning, save as factors to be screened out mathematically to determine comparative school performances.

In Australia, human capital formation theory currently dominates all social policy and the notion of the social has almost entirely disappeared, save for discussion of individual persons with particular needs (see Reid, 1998;Taylor, Rivzi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997). However, schools make their own decisions about the meanings of such policies and considerations of equity are still on the agenda of many. Because the disciplinary processes of schools are heavily implicated in the exclusion and marginalisation of particular raced, classed and gendered students, schools concerned with the social often turn to welfare and remedial programmes for those students and families designated 'at risk'. If such 'social' programmes are framed by school effectiveness assumptions then the likelihood is that they will fail to come to grips with the ways in which their institutional, social and knowledge practices are involved in shaping unequal educational benefits for children. If the programmes are also framed within a welfarist framework, in other words they set out to ameliorate problems, deal with symptoms rather than causes (e.g. Fraser, 1997; Johnston, 1995; Katz, 1995), then similarly, the status quo will be shored up rather than challenged.

My concern is to find ways to move in schools that do not ignore broader social issues, that work to change the school practices that perpetuate inequity, that run counter to narrow basic skills and welfarist approaches and are motivated by commitments to citizenship and justice.

Risk and schooling.

All sectors of Australian schooling are now enmeshed in the rhetoric of 'risk' to describe both the minority of students who require the most attention and those who are considered likely to be disruptive, need additional welfare support, tutoring, and medical attention. A battery of identification and diagnostic checklists have been made available by 'experts' to assist schools to identify those who already, or may in the future, not conform to the designated norms of behaviour and learning. The notion of full service schools has become enshrined in federal government policy to mean interagency health and welfare services - such schools are in communities designated as 'at risk', with high concentrations of individual students and families 'at risk' [1].

I want to consider how it is that the logic of stories of 'risk' work and what effects they produce. When applied to students the use of 'risk' discourse constructs a kind of black box around the students, their families and their cultures. Everyone inside the box is somehow different from everyone outside. This has a number of effects:

- It establishes a norm, a kind of ideal, from which some students are designated as different, and therefore ' at risk'. When their 'risk behaviours' are examined, they expose their alter - ego, the norm. For example, if failure to read is a 'risk' and the children 'at risk' who do not read are poor, mostly male, and poorly behaved, they create the norm as female, privileged and compliant. In the 'at risk' stories, the norm is never indigenous, Asian only in relation to stereotypes about Mathematics and Science learning, seldom of low income, rarely anything but able bodied and is variously male and female.
- It paves the way for descriptions of the consequences of 'risky behaviours' which contain their own in-built solutions. For example, failure to achieve a pre-determined curriculum or set of skills might be thought to lead to a potential lack of involvement in the labour market and to potential social disruption. Avoiding the consequences of such 'risky behaviours' then set the terms of the intervention programme , viz, labour market programmes, remedial, back to basics approaches and social skills projects.

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[1] This is not to be mistaken for the work on Full Service Schools undertaken by the Australian Centre for Equity through Education . The federal policy use glosses over many of the ambiguities involved in the notion of school - community programs (see Boyd, W. L. (1997). Competing Models of Schools and Communities: The Struggle to Reframe and Reinvent their Relationships. *Leading and Managing, 3*(3), 188-207.)

- It positions students designated 'at risk' as separate from other students, suggesting that 'at risk' students have no common concerns and interests with the remainder. That a few students have walked out, yelled out or otherwise made themselves visible in class, for example, does not necessarily mean that the remainder are all riveted and working hard. Questions of how relevant and meaningful is the curriculum on offer may involve significantly more than those who have been put in the 'risk' box. Any questions arising from particular kinds of teaching or curricula are obscured by the separation of 'at risk' students . The logic of such isolation is that only 'risky students require a separate programme, rather than a holistic policy and programmatic response to the broader group.
- It homogenises all those 'at risk', suggesting that there is something common to all students exhibiting 'risk behaviours'. This lumping together of a variety of issues and needs together in one category makes 'risk' amenable to one magic educational solution -such as remedial reading lessons
- It locates 'risk' within individuals, families and cultures rather than in a set of organised institutional and social processes, and ignores the positive attributes of individuals, families and cultures. It therefore locates the policy solution in things that must be done to and for individuals, families and cultures, obliterating and working against those things that individuals, families and cultures might do for themselves
- At the same time as 'risk' reduces the complexities and differences in lives to a few factors there are also a proliferation of categorisations of specialised individual 'riskiness'. A variety of 'expert' professional systems from the medical, health, psychology, psychiatry and special education disciplines get to work on 'risky' people rather than work being done on the institutional arrangements of the schools themselves.

(See Fine, 1995; Fine & Weis, 1998; Gitlin, Margonis, & Brunjes, 1993; Swadener, 1995).

But 'risk' discourse alone does not assist us to design interventions that avoid the pitfalls of individualising, demonising, and pathologising [2] and help us discover how it is that schooling might be complicit in these 'risk' behaviours.

[2] This same set of normalising and fragmenting processes also works on communities where entire locations are lumped together on the basis of population statistics, and the causes of problems such as structural unemployment, declining public services and increased racism, are reduced to the level of individuals and institutions at fault and at 'risk'.

Some years ago, not too long after the incident with the girl and her chair, we established a monitoring system for the secondary withdrawal room, the place where teachers sent the boys, because they were nearly all boys, when they could no longer tolerate them in the room. After three months, we found that there was a 'core' of twelve boys in Years 8 and 9 who spent more time in the withdrawal room than anywhere else. We thought that what was needed was some kind of anger management programme and we were some way down the track with organising that when the light bulb finally came on. It was not until we asked ourselves a new set of questions - " If this was a learning problem what might it be? If this was something that we were doing, what would that be? How could we find out?" - that we realised we had to ask the boys themselves what was going on.

The boys' stories were a combination of deep disaffection with school, a history of difficulties in learning combined with inadequate literacy skills for the tasks required, and a set of behaviours that protected them from exposure to failure and ridicule, particularly from their peers. This was hardly new news, but it seemed as if we had not managed to put together what we knew in the abstract about schooling working class kids with what was happening with this particular set of boys.

The boys and a teacher designed a six month program that involved time out of some mainstream classes They engaged in building bicycles, lots of discussions about life, the universe, and masculinity as well as reading about bicycles and other areas of their interest. It was, I think the staff would agree, expensive but worth while. While none of the boys became overnight 'goodies', they all stayed and progressed in their mainstream classes at the end of the six month period, and the majority of them hung on in school beyond our initial expectations. Given that they were all well on the track to being early school leavers, and suspended, and excluded for much of the forseeable future until they reached the end of compulsory schooling, this programme did make a difference, even though it was not a miracle.

What is needed are some ways of using the understandings about the pitfalls of 'risk' stories, the little traps set within the word, to help construct programmes. I propose that we consider developing a set of principles that might guide our thinking.

Principles for programmes that might make a difference.

Based on my analysis of the ways that the discourses of 'risk' operate, I suggest that programmes that make a difference ideally should:

- respond to immediate need(s)
- design interventions around needs, not attempt to arrive at a one best answer or magic techniques
- try to find common concerns between the 'at risk' students and the remainder and build in ways that the 'at risk' group can stay connected and affiliated with their peers
- avoid attributing blame to individuals, cultures or families
- continually read against the grain to find the implicit norm (s) and establish monitoring processes that will show up the effects of interventions on marginalised groups
- involve individuals, families and wider local networks in determining solutions
- avoid having professionals re-tell peoples' stories, describing the problems and solutions in expert professional terms in isolation from the people concerned
- examine how the institutional practices, curriculum and pedagogies of schooling may contribute to the behaviour and use those understandings to inform whole school reform
- maintain broad goals of identity, citizenship and active participation for students in both the present and future, rather than narrow instrumental and economist ends in the future
- maintain a focus on the broad social, economic and political relations through which both schools, students and their families are positioned and on which they can act.

Such principles need to be put into practice.

Principles for programmes that make a difference - three caveats

While I have clearly placed myself with those who argue that whole school reform is ultimately required to make a difference for children , families and communities placed 'at risk', I also want to acknowledge that this is not always

possible. Some argue that alternative programmes work to shore up the mainstream (e.g. Fine, 1995) .While I do not disagree with this proposition I know from experience that some times some young people are too alienated from school, and the school from them, for there to be even medium term reconciliation. Alternative programmes that assist such young people back into main-stream credentialling may be all that can realistically be achieved.

Then there is the argument that 'risk' and affirmative programmes can obscure the material conditions in which the children and the families live . Ellsworth (1998 : 331) for example suggests that the American early intervention programme Head Start,

> 'with its cheery and reassuring face can "inspire delusions". These delusions are dangerous because of their capacity to divert attention away from the barbarities of increasing poverty among children'

The answer to such concerns is surely not to abandon educational programmes. Schools cannot change deep social polarisations, and

> (w)ith even the most enlightened leadership and all the best breaks, schools by themselves cannot dent .... poverty, crime and racial isolation .... (Katz, 1995: 135)

This criticism seems to me to be one more usefully directed to policy, since it is surely a matter of not letting public policy makers get away with promising that programmes such as Head Start will make dramatic and widespread social and economic changes.

In Australia, my own research suggests that there are now a growing group of young people who have decided that there is little point to schooling, since the link between credentials and employment seems to have disappeared. Whether in school or outside of it, this group is angry and disillusioned, forced to bear the brunt of economic change and public policy decisions made far away by a generation that was considerably more fortunate. Offering these young people more schooling and/or training is a fraught endeavour and any reluctance they have towards alternative or mainstream programmes is more than understandable. Schools should not take *all* the blame for the alienation of these young people. Undoubtedly schooling is an important factor in their

situation, but the broader social question of the decline of the teenage job (Bessant & Cook, 1998; James, Veit, & Wright, 1997; Katz, 1998; Speirings & Spoehr, 1996; Spencer, 1998) needs exposure and public discussion.

Cultures that support programmes that make a difference

I am going to make only a few basic points about the kinds of school cultures - that is values, philosophies, stories and symbols - that support the kinds of principled programmes I am advocating. Structures and cultures are mutually constructed: they both require active and continued effort and attention by school leaders and the separation I have made here in my text is an artificial one. Structure and culture work together to constitute a school eco- system (Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996).

Cultures that support all young people are founded on the positive regard and respect that adults have for young people, on their genuine interest in youth cultures, on their unwavering commitment to the view that all children and young people can learn successfully and in their persistence in the pursuit of ways to connect and re-connect young people with schooling. In such school cultures, students are encouraged to have their voices heard as a legitimate part of the school and in all reform processes and programmes (Dryfoos, 1998). Such school cultures are also highly localised and work with their particular and unique neighbourhoods and communities .

These school cultures support teachers in the emotional labour required for working in professionally demanding situations (Luttrell, 1997), are geared to helping staff to form collaborative professional relationships (Westheimer, 1998) and to transform their classrooms into 'landscapes of promise not landscapes of condemnation' (Polakow, 1993). The formal and informal curriculum is geared to helping young people find solidarities in difference, stability in the constancy of change, and security in the precariousness of a risky society (Gilbert, 1997). There is an overt commitment to assisting everybody and to making special efforts to help those who are made most vulnerable (Coles, 1995), understanding that young people act in ways that assist their own marginalisation, and that acts of resistance vary, with gender, location and cultural factors creating observable specificities (Wyn & White, 1997).The degree to which young people exercise agency through the act of leaving school or through acting in ways that ensure that they are required to go, is situational and contingent, dependent on the young person's 'time,

space, activity, resources and identity .... and upon their own biography and psychological makeup' (p143). Schools with supportive cultures therefore value and build on 'idiosyncrasy' (Donmoyer, 1993), those things that make each of us uniquely human, working to make school a place where everybody has the space to 'be somebody' (Wexler, Crichlow, Kern, & Martusewicz, 1992).

Structures that support programmes that make a difference

There are three major foci that need to be at work in schools that hope to establish programmes founded on this culture and the principles. The foci are

1. individual students, for whom there are welfare programmes that deal with particular kinds of behaviour such as attendance, early school leaving, compounded discipline and learning issues, substance abuse, living in a high stress family situation.
2. groups of students, where gender, physical ability, culture, race, ethnicity and poverty are researched, and affirmative action intervention approaches developed, and
3. the whole school, around which questions of culture (metaphor, language, ritual, symbols), structure(organisation of space, time and student grouping) curriculum (knowledge content and divisions, assessment practices) and pedagogy (teaching/learning approaches) are reformed.

The work that our school staff did starting with the girl with an eating disorder, involved all three foci - the girls, girls and boys and the whole school. The second story about the naughty boys clearly showed that we stopped after looking at the individuals involved. Consequently, the next year there were another group of boys who were produced for the withdrawal room and the school staff had to face the question of whether there needed to be a permanent alternative programme to 'catch ' them before they fell out of school. The reasons that they appeared in the withdrawal room were very complex and raised more questions than ideas for reform.

For each focus there is an overall goal - what is to be achieved- and a motif - symbolising the direction of action, and a set of processes that are used. What follows is not presented as an answer, a one best solution, but rather as one particular solution that suited one particular school and one particular staff at the time. This schema is offered as an imperfect and partial response

and it was never as neatly implemented as might be thought from the way that I will present it.

1. Individuals. We decided that our main goal was to keep individual students at school by re-connecting (the motif) with them, to find out what was working to dis-connect them from schooling. This dis-connection may have been the result of things that we were doing or other external, social factors. Dis-connection appeared most often as attendance and behavioural problems. The processes involved were identification (we called this kid-mapping), mentoring, and providing support through a range of school and interagency arrangements. The people with whom we had to work cooperatively to develop responsive programs were the individual students and their families [3].

   So, for example, our intervention program for little boys (Year 2-3) [4] who were having difficulty learning and were acting up badly in school, involved working with their parents. We did not make their parents into unpaid school helpers although we did at their request run some workshops on how to help with reading at home. What was important for us was learning what home resources the boys could bring to school on which to base their learning. What was important for the boys was a concerted effort by home and school to change a pattern of behaviours that were causing them to miss out. In developing this programme, we saw ourselves as directly accountable to the parents for the boys' progress.

2. Groups of students. We decided that our goal with particular groups of students was to include (the motif) them in the life of the school so that they could actively participate in school programs. The processes we used were participatory action research and affirmative action programmes. The people with whom we had to work were local networks and community groups.

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[3] The usual notion is that it is other agencies with whom schools should cooperate. I believe that this leads to a hegemony of professionals (see Katz, M., Fine, M., & Simon, E. (1997). Poking Around: Outsiders View Chicago School Reform. *Teachers College Record, 99*(1), 117-157. for one piece of research evidence) and rather, all the professionals should see them selves as accountable to the students and families involved.

[4] The program was called Boys in the Fast Lane and has been documented in Hill, S., Nixon, H., Comber, B., Badger, L., & Wilkinson, L. (1996). *Literacy Learning and Social Justice* [videos and booklet]. Melbourne: Eleanor Curtain Publishing.

For example, our senior Special Education class (aged 15 years plus) worked with a community based volunteer organisation and local government on community based projects such as gardening, and simple household repairs for elderly residents. In addition they were connecting with disability action groups and programmes.

A subsequent group worked on cross age tutoring projects, and they documented - by making posters and videos -the cooperative learning programmes in all the local schools, including ours.

3. Whole school. We decided that the issues here were retention and success. The process we were engaged in, as expressed in our formal school plans, was whole school reform - the development of an educationally just pedagogy and a democratic curriculum with the broad goals of active citizenship within which individual students could negotiate particular patterns of learning, depending on their interests and aspirations. The point was for all students to achieve (the motif). The school positioned itself as an active partner in community development activities [5], and promoted the growth of social networks and self help projects.

   For example, we ran a very strong campaign to prevent students from leaving school early and all students who felt they had to leave couldn't do so until they had seen a member of the school administration and answered the question, "What would we have to do to get you to stay here?" Sometimes this involved assisting the student to negotiate alternative programmes, sometimes part time schooling, sometimes help in accessing further education. Quite often, the very fact that we cared to stop and talk was enough.

   On one occasion four local schools including ours won a grant to look at creating a supportive school environment for non English speaking parents. We collectively decided that our first priority was to get in contact with more parents because we did not know nearly enough about our Cambodian, Vietnamese, Spanish

[5] See for example Heckman, P., Skull, R. W., & Conley, S. (1996). Conflict and Consensus: The Bitter and Sweet in a Community -School Coalition. In J. Cibulka & W. Kritek (Eds.), *Coordination among Schools, Families , and Communities. Prospects for Educational Reform* (pp. 49-68). Albany, New York: State University of New York Press. Maeroff, G. (1998). *Altered Destinies. Making life better for schoolchildren in need.* New York: Teachers College Press., Mukhergee, D. (1997, November). *Full Service Schools.* Paper presented at the Australian Education Research Association, Brisbane.

speaking and Aboriginal local communities. We procured another grant to employ four fabric artists who worked with groups of women from each cultural grouping to make four beautiful hangings that showed the country from which they had come, and images of their new homes. Some of the women got very interested in the new techniques they were learning - silk painting, silk-screening, applique - and asked for help in setting up a small business. This was possible because a local employment scheme provided training and set up funds. The launching of the banners was a joyous affair with performances from all of the groups involved. To the schools' shame we found we had had a Cambodian orchestra in our midst, a semi professional Cambodian dance troupe, a professional Latin American trio, and a brilliant young didge player. These of course have now become part of the ongoing life of the four schools.

What happened next was even more remarkable. A large meeting organised itself in our parent drop in centre and I was informed that over forty parents wanted English classes. After some negotiation they were all enrolled as part time students and a teacher funded. Several have now gone on to further study and significantly enhanced employment opportunities. For each of the schools there have been a different range of benefits. For our school for example it meant the seamless introduction of the Khmer language with the full support of the local monk, significantly more parents at meetings, connections established between parents and class teachers and some trust between students and the school. For the four schools it meant that we were able to produce a professional video about home literacy practices in a range of cultural settings for teacher professional development: the video has been distributed nationally.

The three foci are summed up in this figure (Fig 1):

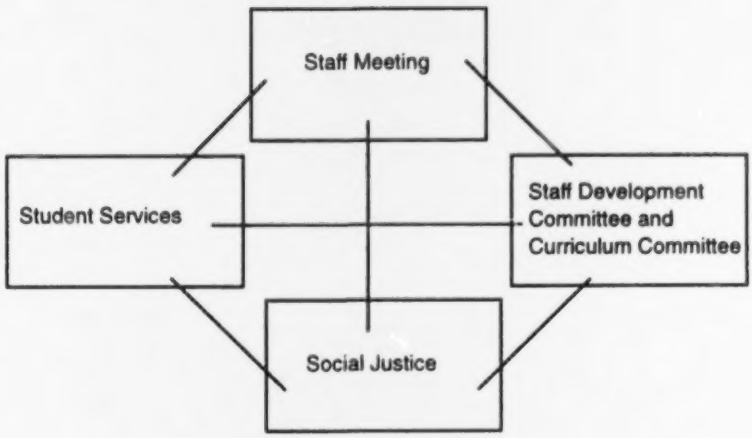
Focus	Individual students	Groups of students	Whole school
Goal	Attendance, Behaviour	Participation Achievement	Retention
Motif	Reconnection	Inclusion	Success
Processes	Identification Mentoring Support Interagency	Participatory Action Research Affirmative Action	School Reform: Educationally just pedagogy Democratic curriculum
Working with and accountable to	Family	Community group	Community development- the local neighbourhood
Group responsible	Student Services	Social Justice	Curriculum Committee, Staff Development

Batten and Russell (1995) noted in their review of 'students at risk' literature that while there were many different kinds of 'risks' attributed to students, the programmes that schools developed had a degree of commonality about them. They typically looked at changing teacher student relationships, varying curriculum, reducing the size of the group and the number of teachers. There was an emphasis on practical learning, attention to the whole person, developing links with parents and the community, authentic assessment and cooperative learning approaches often outside the classroom (pp 80-84). One of the keys to successful programs for supporting such children and young people seems to be the provision of well-trained welfare staff (Chamberlain & Mackenzie, 1998). This sums up the kinds of things we tried to do.

What was more important for us was the institutionalisation of the foci, which continued to generate a range of different issues and projects. The key to making all of this work was the allocation of responsibility for specific foci to particular groups of staff. Because ours was a large school the way that this worked was somewhat bureaucratic. It had to be or it wouldn't have functioned. The Student Services consisted of counsellors, health worker and parent liaison officer; the Social Justice Forum consisted of all people involved in affirmative action programmes or involved in specialist services (such as the Aboriginal Education Worker); and the Curriculum and Staff Development Committees were elected by staff. Each group had parent and student representatives and was convened by a member of the school administration team. The *most* important thing was the transmission of information between the responsible staff committees.

The Social Justice Committee knew there was a problem with eating and body image that had to be investigated because the information was passed on from the Student Services Committee. The Curriculum Committee only knew there was a problem with the Health and Personal Development curriculum because they were told by the Social Justice Forum. This information circulation happened informally between staff, and formally at school administration meetings and scheduled joint meetings of the groups. The Curriculum Committee and Staff Development Committee specifically sought information from the other two groups in order to do the annual school planning and budgeting. See (Fig 2)

Fig. 2



What this information and decision making structure accomplished for us was a way to continue to pay attention to what it was that the *school* was doing to *place* 'at risk' particular students, to experiment with approaches that might make a difference, and then try to incorporate those learnings into our mainstream programmes. I cannot say that this was universally and absolutely successful. We certainly enabled a lot of young people to stay at school , to find a place within it to 'become somebody' (Wexler et al., 1992) and we did get close to our ideal of full retention and approached our broad citizenship goals. I think we also achieved a significant shift in the general pedagogy that was used in most classrooms. What teachers knew was that more students could learn and be in the school. We certainly did not get nearly close enough to all students achieving the more narrow goal of the Year 12 credential and upward mobility (although there was significant improvement).

And perhaps after all that is an impossible dream, something too much to expect against the odds that are stacked up against our students, families and communities.

Resources.

There is little doubt that developing programmes for students, families and communities placed 'at risk' is a costly business. No matter how committed a staff and its governing body are to the kinds of principles, culture and structures that support individuals and groups of needy and disaffected children and young people, no matter how hard they work to reform the

whole school, the net effects are heavily dependent on resources. This is a very unpopular view in neo liberal climates where balancing the budget takes precedence over all else and where workfare and means testing create a new harsh regime for the poor, those who are unemployed or whose families have fractured. Schools can only do so much.

> *...Any educational initiatives that are chosen for (disadvantaged) schools and districts will need to be combined with attempts to improve the economic and political milieus in which the schools are located' (Anyon, 1997: 170)*

While things can be done to achieve better coordination among services, the dreams of those of us who work in communities pushed to the social and economic edges can only be fully put into effect if those dreams are also shared by policymakers. The notion of an intergenerational responsibility for the young is surely one of, if not *the* most important policy platform any society can have.

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Australian Centre for Equity through Education

Linking education, health and community services to challenge educational and social inequalities

29

Who we are

The Australian Centre for Equity through Education (ACEE) was established in 1994 as an initiative of the Australian Youth Foundation (AYF), through a consortium of organisations: Eduquate; the Australian Council of State School Organisations; the Australian Education Union; and the Australian Council of Social Service.

The Centre is the focal point for a unique network of people working in education, health and community service agencies.

Why we exist

Young people today are growing up in an increasingly complex world where a smooth transition from school to work is by no means assured. In particular geographic areas across Australia poor educational outcomes coincide with unemployment, low income and poor health.

600,000 Australian children live below the poverty line and in any one week 11,000 school students are numbered among the homeless. The primary schools and high schools these children and young people attend work within social and economic environments that constrain and add to the complexity of their education task.

It has become increasingly clear to schools and school communities that the social and health problems their students and their families face can only be dealt with by cooperation and collaboration across education, health, and community services.

ACEE was established to advocate, foster, and promote this collaboration.

What we do

The Australian Centre for Equity through Education ...

- promotes the concept of *'full service' schools* to facilitate access to educational, health and social services
- helps schools and groups *identify and analyse needs*, and establish *frameworks for action*
- offers *customised training and development*
- presents *papers, keynote addresses and workshops*
- develops and maintains *links across education, health and community services*
- maintains an *ACEE website* linked to school and youth networks
- organises *conferences, regional seminars, and workshops*
- provides accessible and useable *data and information* on education and social issues.

How we work

The Centre links education, health and community services by ...

- acting on the causes rather than the outcomes of educational disadvantage
- developing new partnerships, new models, and new will
- promoting equity.

It supports people and organisations working with disadvantaged young people, schools and communities by ...

- promoting and informing debates
- building and maintaining networks that link individuals, schools, communities, social services and other agencies
- developing appropriate resources
- identifying and promoting good practice
- researching and analysing demographic, social and economic influences on educational opportunities and outcomes.

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